

Remarks

I. Introduction

Claim 83 has been amended. Claims 84-87, 89, and 90 are also in the case. All other claims have either been cancelled or withdrawn. Reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested in light of the following further remarks.

II. The Claim Rejections

Claim 83-87, 89, and 90 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as obvious from Kaster et al. U.S. patent 5,234,447 (hereinafter "Kaster") and Yencho et al. U.S. patent 6,206,913 (hereinafter "Yencho"). These rejections are respectfully traversed.

Claim 83 defines embodiments of applicants' invention such as are illustrated by applicants' FIGS. 21a-c. Attached to applicants' Reply to the previous Office action is a copy of these FIGS. which applicants highlighted in yellow to show the limited locations in which the "closed shapes" 82g in applicants' "structure" are connected to one another. (Another copy of these FIGS., with still further annotations, is attached hereto.) In particular, claim 83 specifies that these connections are "along only a central portion of a length of a side of said shape that is transverse to said direction" (which direction is annular of

the structure). This feature of applicants' apparatus has been still further clarified by amending claim 83 to specify that "end portions of the length of that side [i.e., the side referred to immediately above] that continue beyond either end of the central portion [are] spaced from the next adjacent closed shape in the direction that is annular of said structure." This defines the notches or recesses in applicants' structure that are to either side (left and right) of each yellow-highlighted connection in applicants' FIG. 21a (see the attached annotated copy of that FIG.).

Claim 83 goes on to specify that the result of this construction is "so that expansion of any of said shapes in the direction that is annular of said structure causes the entirety of said structure and the entirety of said connector to annularly enlarge." With reference to applicants' FIG. 21a, this refers to the fact that expansion of any of shapes 82g in the direction that is annular of the structure (i.e., the vertical direction in FIG. 21a) causes applicants' entire "structure" to enlarge in that annular direction. And because all other parts 86g and 88g of applicants' connector are attached to the claimed "structure," annular enlargement of the "structure" also causes applicants' entire connector to similarly annularly enlarge.

Neither Kaster nor Yencho shows anything like the connector construction thus defined in claim 83.

Yencho does not show any connectors that employ only a single row of closed shapes that are connected to one another in such a way that the entire connector annularly enlarges when any one of those closed shapes expands in the direction that is annular of the connectors. Applicants attached annotated copies of several of Yencho's drawings to their Reply to the last Office action. The pink annotations of those FIGS. demonstrate that in every instance Yencho's connections have one or more solid rings that extend annularly all the way around the connector. These solid rings make it impossible for "the entirety" of Yencho's connectors to annularly expand, as specified by applicants in claim 83.

Kaster shows only a connecting unit 46 that is a simple strip of metal. Nowhere does Kaster disclose or suggest constructing connecting unit 46 as a row of "closed shapes" (with "open centers") that are connected to one another in the manner specified by applicants in claim 83. Kaster therefore does not disclose or suggest a connector in which expansion of such closed shapes in the annular direction causes the entirety of the connector to annularly enlarge.

The foregoing demonstrates that important features of applicants' invention as defined in claim 83 are not shown or suggested in either Yencho or Kaster. Claim 83 is therefore not obvious from Yencho and Kaster, and this claim should accordingly be allowed. The same is true for all of applicants' other claims that remain under active prosecution in this case, because all of these other claims are dependent from claim 83 and have only been rejected on the same references as have been used against claim 83. Thus all of claims 83-87, 89, and 90 should be allowed.


There are also many other reasons why claims 83-87, 89, and 90 should be allowed. Many of these other reasons are detailed or at least mentioned in applicants' Reply to the last Office action, and applicants hereby reiterate and maintain all of those other reasons. One argument that applicants have made repeatedly is that Kaster does not show a structure that is "annularly continuous." Applicants simply do not understand why the Examiner refuses to admit the truth of that assertion. Nevertheless, to make this point even clearer, applicants have amended claim 83 to state that the "structure" of their connector "forms a continuous and uninterrupted ring all the way around the outside of the tubular graft conduit." This distinction, together with the absence in Kaster of any closed cellular structure and the

fact that Kaster operates entirely by plastic (not resilient) deflections, makes Kaster of little or no relevance to applicants' claims. Again, applicants continue to maintain all of their earlier arguments for the allowability of this application.

III. Conclusion

The foregoing demonstrates that claims 83-87, 89, and 90 are allowable. All other claims have been either cancelled or withdrawn. This application is therefore in condition for allowance, which is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,



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